(b) whether plastic bags convert fertile soil into barren; and

(c) if so, the steps Government are taking to check the manufacturing and use of plastic and the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and (b) Plastics are polymers of long-chain hydrocarbons derived from Petroleum. They are chemically inert or neutral and used for the manufacture of a large number of consumer items and can be recycled. Plastics by themselves are not harmful. Only the indiscriminate littering of plastics and environmentally unsound recycling practices has the potential to cause adverse impacts on environment and health. Plastic bags are generally made of polyethylene and are non-biodegradable.

(c) A set of rules entitled the Recycled Plastics Manufacture and Usage Rules, 1999 amended 2003 has been brought out to regulate the usage of plastic carry bags and to encourage collection of wastes. These rules prescribe that only virgin plastic material be used for storing, carrying, dispensing, or packaging of foodstuffs. These rules also prohibit the manufacture, stocking, distribution or selling of carry bags made of virgin/ recycled plastics, which are below 8 x 12 inches in size and 20 microns in thickness.

Exemption of SEZs and EPZs from submitting EIA reports

2946. SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the SEZs and EPZs below 50 hectares were exempted from submitting the environment impact assessment reports;

(b) if so, what are the reasons for this exemption;

(c) the list of exempted SEZs and EPZs and also the effects of this on the livelihood security of the people in that area, State-wise; and

(d) whether Government would take a holistic view in safeguarding the livelihood at the time of allowing construction and industrial activities?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) Yes, Sir except in the areas where the pollution potential is high.

(b) As per the provisions of Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 1994, as amended *vide* S.O No. 801 (E) dated 7th July, 2004, new industrial estates including SEZs and EPZs above 50 hectares only have to obtain prior environmental clearance from the Central Government. However, if the pollution potential is high, all industrial estates irrespective of the area shall obtain environmental clearance under the said Notification.

(c) and (d) Does not arise.

Transfer of forest land to Travancore Devaswam Board

2947. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the requisite stretch of forest land was transferred to Travancore Devaswam Board for the purpose of providing basic facilities like drinking water, sanitation, parking facilities, shelters, medical facilities, etc. to the pilgrims visiting Sabarimala shrine in the Pampa-Sannidhana area;

(b) what is the stage of providing such facilities if the land in question has already been given; and

(c) by when the whole process will be completed?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) On the basis of the proposals received from the State Government of Kerala, the Central Government has diverted under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, 110.524 hectares of forest land at Nilakkal and 12.675 hectares in Periyar Tiger Reserve for providing facilities like drinking water, sanitation, parking facilities, shelters etc. to the pilgrims and for development of Sabarimala Temple.

(b) and (c) In the above approvals, the Central Government has stipulated that all the activities in the diverted forest land shall be undertaken strictly according to the proposed Master Plan prepared by the State Government for development of Sabarimala Temple and that the forest land shall not be used for any purpose other than that specified in the Master Plan. Therefore,